THE THIEF AND THE DOGS

INTRODUCTION

No writer of the modern Arab world has enjoyed a success in literature to approach that of Naguib Mahfouz. His work has become appreciated as a voluminous and sharply focused reflection of the Egyptian experience through the turbulent changes of the twentieth century. His fame within the Middle East is consequently unrivalled and the importance of his score of published works has been widely noted abroad. Many of his stories have previously appeared in English and other foreign languages and he has received honorary awards and degrees from Denmark, France and the Soviet Union. His achievements are all the more extraordinary for his having remained employed full-time for over thirty years in various departments of the Egyptian civil service, in which he reached administrative positions of importance before his retirement in 1972.

The work of Mahfouz, then, reveals many of the changes of aspiration and orientation of Egyptian intellectuals over the span of

his lifetime. In the thirties, a time when Mahfouz was emerging from Cairo University with a degree in philosophy, Egyptians were struggling for equilibrium between the contradictory pulls of pride in Islam or in ancient Egypt. Their dilemma was compounded by their awareness of the attitude of foreigners towards their national heritage. They witnessed every day in the streets of Cairo the enthusiasm of archaeologists and tourists for the treasures of their ancient tombs and pyramids but they also knew of the glories of their heritage from Islam and the Arabs in religion, architecture, culture and, above all, language. And they were only too aware of the disdain of foreigners for the state of their contemporary government and society.

Mahfouz' dilemma in orientation lasted, however, only for the thirties, during which period he composed a rather strange medley of short stories dealing with the life of his own time and several works on the ancient history of his country. He translated an English text on ancient Egypt and wrote three historical novels depicting aspects of the lives and times of the pharaohs. In them his particular concern was for the relationships between rulers and the people and the uprising of the Egyptians against the Hyksos invaders, subjects of obvious interest to his readers critical of the despotic Egyptian monarchy under King Farouk, himself dominated by the strong British presence in the country. By the early forties, however, Mahfouz had abandoned his plan of constructing a massive series of novels based on ancient history and almost all his work since has related specifically to the Egypt that he has himself witnessed.

In that middle period of his work, then, he wrote a series of novels, first published obscurely and later to achieve great and continuing popularity, that dealt both with his own milieu, the Muslim middle-class of Cairo, and with that of the colorful characters of the conservative quarters of the ancient city. These were followed by his *Trilogy*, which caused a literary sensation in the late fifties and consequently drew attention back to his earlier works. A voluminous work, the *Trilogy* presents a detailed panorama of the life of three generations of a Cairo merchant-class family over the turbulent first half of this century. It is a fascinating study of the social, political, religious

and philosophical strains experienced by his countrymen at that time of fast transition and the consequent effects on their personal relationships.

Following the 1952 Revolution of General Naguib and Colonel Nasser, Mahfouz wrote nothing for seven years. His 1959 *Awlad Haritna* (translated as *Children of Gebelawi*) was serialized in the daily newspaper *al-Ahram* and never since republished in Egypt. It is a pessimistic portrayal in allegorical form of man's struggle for comprehension and solution of the problems of his existence. Discouraged by the furor the novel caused in traditional and religious circles, Mahfouz again refrained from writing for some time, until the publication of this novel, *The Thief and the Dogs*, in 1961. It was well received and was followed by a stream of fine novels in the sixties that detailed with delicacy and great courage the crisis of identity and conscience suffered by Egyptian intellectuals during that period of pervasive malaise and dissatisfaction.

His more recent works, following the 1967 war with Israel, have been circumspect and philosophical and he has favored the short story and the short play for expression of his frequently allegorical themes. However, *al-Hubb Tahta al-Matar* (*Love in the Rain*) published in mid-1973 in book form only, without serialization in the widely read daily press, contrasted (and by implication criticized) the free and at times immoral life which continued in Cairo with the soldiers' endless waiting, in discomfort and fear of death, for the inevitable renewal of warfare with Israel.

The present novel, then, was first published in 1961 and both its subject treatment and style marked distinct changes from Mahfouz' earlier work. This is a psychological novel, impressionist rather than realist; it moves with the speed and economy of a detective story. Here Mahfouz uses the "stream of consciousness" technique for the first time to show the mental anguish of his central figure consumed by bitterness and a desire for revenge against the individuals and the society who have corrupted and betrayed him and brought about his inevitable damnation. It is a masterly work, swiftly giving the reader a keenly accurate vision of the workings of a sick and embittered mind

doomed to self-destruction. And, as he inevitably comes to the protagonist's disillusionment and despair, the reader gains intimate and authentic impressions of the values and structures of Egyptian society of the period.

Trevor Le Gassick

1

Once more he breathed the air of freedom. But there was stifling dust in the air, almost unbearable heat, and no one was waiting for him; nothing but his blue suit and gym shoes.

As the prison gate and its unconfessable miseries receded, the world—streets belabored by the sun, careening cars, crowds of people moving or still—returned.

No one smiled or seemed happy. But who of these people could have suffered more than he had, with four years lost, taken from him by betrayal? And the hour was coming when he would confront them, when his rage would explode and burn, when those who had betrayed him would despair unto death, when treachery would pay for what it had done.

Nabawiyya. Ilish. Your two names merge in my mind. For years you will have been thinking about this day, never imagining, all the while, that the gates would ever actually open. You'll be watching now, but I won't fall into the trap. At the right moment, instead, I'll strike like Fate.

And Sana? What about Sana?

As the thought of her crossed his mind, the heat and the dust, the hatred and pain all disappeared, leaving only love to glow across a soul as clear as a rain-washed sky.

I wonder how much the little one even knows about her father? Nothing, I suppose. No more than this road does, these passers-by or this molten air.

She had never been out of his thoughts, where bit by bit she'd taken shape, like an image in a dream, for four long years. Would luck now give him some decent place to live, where such love could be equally shared, where he could take joy in being a winner again, where what Nabawiyya and Ilish had done would be no more than a memory, odious, but almost forgotten?

You must pull together all the cunning you possess, to culminate in a blow as powerful as your endurance behind prison walls. Here is a man—a man who can dive like a fish, fly like a hawk, scale walls like a rat, pierce solid doors like a bullet!

How will he look when he first sees you? How will his eyes meet yours? Have you forgotten, Ilish, how you used to rub against my legs like a dog? It was me, wasn't it, who taught you how to stand on your own two feet, who made a man of a cigarette-butt cadger? You've forgotten, Ilish, and you're not the only one: She's forgotten, too, that woman who sprang from filth, from vermin, from treachery and infidelity.

Through all this darkness only your face, Sana, smiles. When we meet I'll know how I stand. In a little while, as soon as I've covered the length of this road, gone past all these gloomy arcades, where people used to have fun. Onward and upward. But not to glory. I swear I hate you all.

The bars have shut down and only the side streets are open, where plots are hatched. From time to time he has to cross over a hole in the pavement set there like a snare and the wheels of tramcars growl and shriek like abuse. *Confused cries seem to seep from the curbside garbage. (I swear I hate you all.) Houses of temptation, their windows beckoning even when eyeless, walls scowling where plaster has fallen. And that strange lane, al-Sayrafi Lane, which brings back dark memories. Where the thief stole, then vanished, whisked away. (Woe to the traitors.) Where police who'd staked out the area had slithered in to surround you.*

The same little street where a year before you'd been carrying home flour to make sweetmeats for the Feast, that woman walking in front of you, carrying Sana in her swaddling clothes. Glorious days—how real they were, no one knows—the Feast, love, parenthood, crime. All mixed up with this spot.

The great mosques and, beyond them, the Citadel against the clear sky, then the road flowing into the square, where the green park lies under the hot sun and a dry breeze blows, refreshing despite the heat—the Citadel square, with all its burning recollections.

What's important now is to make your face relax, to pour a little cold water over your feelings, to appear friendly and conciliatory, to play the planned role well. He crossed the middle of the square, entered Imam Way, and walked along it until he came close to the three-story house at the end, where two little streets joined the main road. *This social visit will tell you what they've got up their sleeves. So study the road carefully, and what's on it. Those shops, for instance, where the men are staring at you, cowering like mice.*

"Said Mahran!" said a voice behind him. "How marvellous!"

He let the man catch up with him; they said hello to each other, hiding their real feelings under mutual grins. *So the bastard has friends. He'll know right away what all these greetings are about. You're probably peeking at us through the shutters now, Ilish, hiding like a woman.*

"I thank you, Mr. Bayaza."

People came up to them from the shops on both sides of the street; voices were loud and warm in congratulation and Said found himself surrounded by a crowd—his enemy's friends, no doubt—who tried to outdo one another in cordiality:

"Thank God you're back safe and sound."

"We congratulate ourselves, being your close friends!"

"We all said we wished you'd be released on the anniversary of the Revolution."

"I thank God and you, gentlemen," he said, staring at them with his brown, almond-shaped eyes.

Bayaza patted him on the shoulder. "Come into the shop and have a cold drink to celebrate."

"Later," he said quietly. "When I'm back."

"Back?"

One man shouts, directing his voice to the second story of the

house: "Mr. Ilish! Mr. Ilish, come down and congratulate Said Mahran!" *No need to warn him, you black beetle! I've come in broad daylight. I know you've been watching.*

"Back from what?" said Bayaza.

"There's some business I have to settle."

"With whom?" said Bayaza.

"Have you forgotten I'm a father? And that my little girl's with Ilish?"

"No. But there's a solution to every disagreement. In the sacred law."

"And it's best to reach an understanding," said someone else.

"Said, you're fresh out of prison," a third man added in a conciliatory tone. "A wise man learns his lesson."

"Who said I'm here for anything other than to reach an understanding?"

In the second story of the building a window opened, Ilish leaned out, and they all looked up at him tensely. Before a word could be said, a big man wearing a striped garment and police boots came from the front door of the house. Said recognized Hasaballah, the detective, and pretended to be surprised.

"You shouldn't have disturbed yourself. I have only come to reach an amicable settlement," he said with feeling.

The detective came up and patted him all over, searching with practiced speed and skill. "Shut up, you cunning bastard. What did you say you wanted?"

"I've come to reach an understanding about the future of my daughter."

"As if you knew what understanding meant!"

"I do indeed, for my daughter's sake."

"You can always go to court."

Ilish shouted from above: "Let him come up. Come up all of you. You're all welcome." *Rally them round you, coward. I've only come to test the strength of your fortifications. When your hour arrives neither detective nor walls will do you any good.*

They all crowded into a sitting room and planted themselves in sofas and chairs. The windows were opened: flies rushed in with the

light. Cigarette burns had made black spots in the sky-blue carpet and from a large photograph on the wall Ilish was staring, holding a thick stick with both his hands. The detective sat next to Said and began to play with his worry-beads.

Ilish Sidra came into the room, a loose garment swelling round his barrel-like body, his fat round face buttressed by a square chin. His huge nose had a broken bridge. "Thank the Lord you're back safe and sound!" he said, as if he had nothing to fear. But no one spoke, anxious looks passed back and forth, and the atmosphere was tense until Ilish went on talking: "What's over is done with, such things happen every day; unhappiness can occur, and long-established friendships often break up. But only shameful deeds can shame a man."

Conscious that his eyes were glittering, that he was slim and strong, Said felt like a tiger crouched to spring on an elephant. He found himself repeating Ilish's words: "Only shameful deeds can shame a man." Many eyes stared back at him; the detective's fingers stopped playing with his beads; realizing what was passing in their minds, he added as an afterthought, "I agree with every word you say."

"Come to the point," the detective broke in, "and stop beating about the bush."

"Which point?" Said said innocently.

"There's only one point to discuss, and that's your daughter."

And what about my wife and my fortune, you mangy dogs! I'll show you. Just wait. How I'd like to see now the look you'll have in your eyes. It would give me respect for beetles, scorpions, and worms, you vermin. Damn the man who lets himself be carried away by the melodious voice of woman. But Said nodded in agreement.

One of the sycophants said, "Your daughter is in safe hands with her mother. According to the law a six-year-old girl should stay with her mother. If you like, I could bring her to visit you every week."

Said raised his voice, deliberately, so that he could be heard outside the room: "According to the law she should be in my custody. In view of the various circumstances."

"What do you mean?" Ilish said, suddenly angry.

"Arguing will only give you a headache," said the detective, trying to placate him.

"I have committed no crime. It was partly fate and circumstances, partly my sense of duty and decency that drove me to do what I did. And I did it partly for the sake of the little girl."

A sense of duty and decency, indeed, you snake! Double treachery, betrayal, and infidelity! O, for the sledge hammer and the axe and the gallows rope! I wonder how Sana looks now. "I did not leave her in need," Said said, as calmly as he could, "She had my money, and plenty of it."

"You mean your loot," the detective roared, "the existence of which you denied in court!"

"All right, call it what you like. But where has it gone?"

"There wasn't a penny, believe me, friends!" Ilish protested loudly. "She was in a terrible predicament. I just did my duty."

"Then how have you been able to live in such comfort," Said challenged, "and spend so generously on others?"

"Are you God, that you should call me to account?"

"Peace, peace, shame the devil, Said," said one of Ilish's friends.

"I know you inside out, Said," the detective said slowly. "I can read your thoughts better than anyone. You will only destroy yourself. Just stick to the subject of the girl. That's the best thing for you."

Said looked down to hide his eyes, then smiled and said, in a tone of resignation, "You're quite right, officer."

"I know you inside out. But I'll go along with you. Out of consideration for the company here present. Bring the girl, someone. Wouldn't it be better to find out first what she thinks?"

"What do you mean, officer?"

"Said, I know you. You don't want the girl. And you can't keep her, because you'll have difficulty enough finding some accommodation for yourself. But it's only fair and kind to let you see her. Bring in the girl."

Bring in her mother, you mean. How I wish our eyes could meet, so I might behold one of the secrets of hell! O, for the axe and the sledge hammer!

Ilish went to fetch the girl. At the sound of returning footsteps Said's heart began to beat almost painfully and as he stared at the door, he bit the inside of his lips, anticipation and tenderness stifling all his rage.

After what seemed a thousand years, the girl appeared. She looked surprised. She was wearing a pretty white dress and white open slippers that showed henna-dyed toes. She gazed at him, her face dark, her black hair flowing over her forehead, while his soul devoured her. Bewildered, she looked around at all the other faces, then particularly at his, which was staring so intently. He was unable to take his eyes off her. As she felt herself being pushed towards him, she planted her feet in the carpet and leaned backward away from him. And suddenly he felt crushed by a sense of total loss.

It was as if, in spite of her almond-shaped eyes, her long face, and her slender, aquiline nose, she was not his own daughter. Where were the instinctive ties of blood and soul? Were they, too, treacherous, deceptive? And how could he, even so, resist the almost overwhelming desire to hug her to him for ever?

"This is your father, child," said the detective impatiently.

"Shake hands with Daddy," said Ilish, his face impassive.

She's like a mouse. What's she afraid of? Doesn't she know how much I love her? He stretched out his hand towards her, but instead of being able to say anything he had a fit of choking and had to swallow hard, managing only to smile at her tenderly, invitingly.

"No!" said Sana. She backed away, trying to steal out of the room, but a man standing behind stopped her. "Mummy!" she cried, but the man pushed her gently and then began to coax her, "Shake hands with Daddy." Everyone looked on with malicious interest.

Said knew now that prison lashings had not been as cruel as he used to think. "Come to me, Sana," he pleaded, unable to bear her refusal any longer, half-standing and drawing closer to her.

"No!" she shouted.

"I am your daddy." She raised her eyes to Ilish Sidra in bewilderment, but Said repeated emphatically: "I am your daddy, come to me." She shrank back even further. He pulled her towards him almost forcibly, then she screamed, and as he drew her closer, fought back, crying. He leaned forward to kiss her, disregarding his failure and

disappointment, but his lips caught only a whirling arm. "I'm your daddy, don't be afraid. I'm your dad." The scent on her hair filled his mind with the memory of her mother; he felt his face go hard. The child struggled and wept more violently, and finally the detective intervened: "Easy, easy, the child does not know you."

Defeated, Said let her run away. "I will take her," he said angrily, sitting bolt upright.

A moment of silence passed, at the end of which Bayaza said, "Calm yourself first."

"She must come back to me."

"Let the judge decide that," the detective said sharply, then turned questioningly to Ilish. "Yes?"

"It has nothing to do with me. Her mother will never give her up, except in compliance with the law."

"Just as I pointed out at the beginning. There's no more to be said. It's up to a court of law."

Said felt that if once given vent, his rage would be unrestrainable and therefore with supreme effort managed to keep it under control, reminding himself of things he had almost forgotten. "Yes, the court of law," he said as calmly as he could.

"And as you can see, the girl is being very well looked after," said Bayaza.

"First find yourself an honest means of living," the detective said with an ironic smile.

Able now to control himself, Said said, "Yes, of course. All that's quite correct. No need to be upset. I'll reconsider the whole affair. The best thing would be to forget the past and start looking for a job to provide a suitable home for the child when the time comes."

During the surprised silence that followed this speech, glances were exchanged, some incredulous, some perhaps not. The detective gathered his worry-beads into his fist and asked, "Have we finished now?"

"Yes," Said answered. "I only want my books."

"Your books?"

"Yes."

"Most of them have been lost by Sana," Ilish said loudly, "but I'll bring you whatever is left." He disappeared for a few minutes and returned carrying a modest pile of books, which he deposited in the middle of the room.

Said leafed through them, picking up one volume after another. "Yes," he remarked sadly, "most of them have been lost."

"How did you acquire all this learning?" the detective said with a laugh, rising to signal the end of the meeting. "Did you steal reading matter as well?"

They all grinned except Said, who went out carrying his books.

2

He looked at the door, open as it always used to be, as he walked up Gabal Road towards it. Here enclosed by ridges of the Muqattam hills, was the Darasa quarter, the scene of so many pleasant memories. The sandy ground was dotted with animals, teeming with children. Said gazed delightedly at the little girls panting from both emotion and exhaustion. Men lolled around him in the shade of the hill, away from the declining sun.

At the threshold of the open door he paused, trying to remember when he'd crossed it last. The simplicity of the house, which could hardly be different from those of Adam's day, was striking. At the left corner of the big, open courtyard stood a tall palm tree with a crooked top; to the right an entrance corridor led by an open door—in this strange house no door was ever closed—to a single room. His heart beat fast, carrying him back to a distant, gentle time of childhood, dreams, a loving father, and his own innocent yearning. He recalled the men filling the courtyard, swaying with their chanting, God's

praise echoing from the depths of their hearts. "Look and listen, learn and open your heart," his father used to say. Besides a joy like the joy of Paradise that was aroused in him by faith and dreams, there had also been the joy of singing and green tea. He wondered how Ali al-Junaydi was.

From inside the room he could hear a man concluding his prayers. Said smiled, slipped in carrying his books, and saw the Sheikh sitting cross-legged on the prayer carpet, absorbed in quiet recitation. The old room had hardly changed. The rush mats had been replaced by new ones, thanks to his disciples, but the Sheikh's sleeping mattress still lay close to the western wall, pierced by a window through which the rays of the declining sun were pouring down at Said's feet. The other walls of the room were half-covered with rows of books on shelves. The odor of incense lingered as if it were the same he remembered, never dissipated, from years ago. Putting down his load of books, he approached the Sheikh.

"Peace be upon you, my lord and master."

Having completed his recitation the Sheikh raised his head, disclosing a face that was emaciated but radiant with overflowing vitality; framed by a white beard like a halo, and surmounted by a white skull cap that nestled in thick locks of hair showing silvery at his temples. The Sheikh scrutinized him with eyes that had been viewing this world for eighty years and indeed had glimpsed the next, eyes that had not lost their appeal, acuteness, or charm. Said found himself bending over his hand to kiss it, suppressing tears of nostalgia for his father, his boyish hopes, the innocent purity of the distant past.

"Peace and God's compassion be upon you," said the Sheikh in a voice like Time.

What had his father's voice been like? He could see his father's face and his lips moving, and tried to make his eyes do the service of ears, but the voice had gone. And the disciples, the men chanting the mystical *dhikr,* "O master, the Prophet is at your gate!"—where were they now?

He sat down cross-legged on the rush mat before the Sheikh. "I am sitting without asking your permission," he said. "I remember

that you prefer that." He sensed that the Sheikh was smiling, though on those lips concealed amidst the whiteness, no smile was visible. Did the Sheikh remember him? "Forgive my coming to your house like this. But there's nowhere else in the world for me to go."

The Sheikh's head drooped to his breast. "You seek the walls, not the heart," he whispered.

Said was baffled; not knowing what to say, he sighed, then quietly remarked, "I got out of jail today."

"Jail?" said the Sheikh, his eyes closed.

"Yes. You haven't seen me for more than ten years, and during that time strange things have happened to me. You've probably heard about them from some of your disciples who know me."

"Because I hear much I can hardly hear anything."

"In any case I didn't want to meet you under false pretences, so I'm telling you I came out of jail, only today."

The Sheikh slowly shook his head, then, opening his eyes, said, "You have not come out of jail." The voice was sorrowful.

Said smiled. This was the language of old times again, where words had a double meaning.

"Master, every jail is tolerable, except the government jail."

The Sheikh glanced at him with clear and lucid eyes, then muttered, "He says every jail is tolerable except the government jail."

Said smiled again, though he'd almost given up hope of being able to communicate, and asked, "Do you remember me?"

"Your concern is the present hour."

Fairly certain that he was remembered, Said asked for reassurance: "And do you remember my father, Mr. Mahran, God have mercy upon his soul?"

"May God have mercy upon all of us."

"What wonderful days those were!"

"Say that, if you can, about the present."

"But . . ."

"God have mercy upon us all."

"I was saying, I have just come out of jail today."

The Sheikh nodded his head, showing sudden vigor. "And as he

was impaled on the stake he smiled and said: 'It was God's will that I should meet Him thus.'"

My father could understand you. But me you turned away from, treating me as if you were turning me out of your house. And even so I've come back here, of my own accord, to this atmosphere of incense and disquiet, because a man so desolate, with no roof over his head, cannot do otherwise.

"Master, I have come to you now when my own daughter has rejected me."

The Sheikh sighed. "God reveals his secrets to His tiniest creatures!"

"I thought that, if God had granted you long life, I should find your door open."

"And the door of Heaven? How have you found that?"

"But there is nowhere on earth for me to go. And my own daughter has rejected me."

"How like you she is!"

"In what way, Master?"

"You seek a roof, not an answer."

Said rested his head with its short, wiry hair on his dark, thin hand, and said: "My father used to seek you when he was in trouble, so I found myself . . ."

"You seek a roof and nothing else."

Convinced that the Sheikh knew who he was, Said felt uneasy but did not know why. "It's not only a roof," he said, "I want more than that. I would like to ask God to be pleased with me."

The Sheikh replied as if intoning. "The celestial Lady said: Aren't you ashamed to ask for His good pleasure while you are not well-pleased with Him?"

The open space outside resounded with the braying of a donkey, which ended in a throaty rattle like a sob. Somewhere a harsh voice was singing, "Where have luck and good fortune gone?" He remembered once when he'd been caught singing by his father "I Give You Three Guesses": his father had punched him gently and said, "Is this an appropriate song on our way to the blessed Sheikh?" He remembered how, in the midst of the chanting, his father had reeled in ecstasy, his eyes swimming, his voice hoarse, sweat pouring down his

face, while he himself sat at the foot of the palm tree, watching the disciples by the light of a lantern, nibbling a fruit, rapt in curious bliss. All that was before he'd felt the first scalding drop of the draught of love.

The Sheikh's eyes were closed now, as if he were asleep, and Said had become so adjusted to the setting and atmosphere that he could no longer smell the incense. It occurred to him that habit is the root of laziness, boredom, and death, that habit had been responsible for his sufferings, the treachery, the ingratitude, and the waste of his life's hard toil. "Are the *dhikr* meetings still held here?" he asked, attempting to rouse the Sheikh.

But the Sheikh gave no answer. Even more uneasy now, Said asked a further question: "Aren't you going to welcome me here?"

The Sheikh opened his eyes and said, "Weak are the seeker and the sought."

"But you are the Master of the house."

"The Owner of the house welcomes you," the Sheikh said, suddenly jovial, "as He welcomes every creature and every thing." Encouraged, Said smiled, but the Sheikh added, as if it were an afterthought, "As for me, I am Master of nothing."

The sunlight on the rush mat had retreated now to the wall.

"In any case," said Said, "this house is my real home, as it always was a home for my father and for every supplicant. You, my Master, deserve all our gratitude."

" 'Lord, you know how incapable I am of doing You justice in thanking you, so please thank yourself on my account!' Thus spake one of the grateful."

"I am in need of a kind word," Said pleaded.

"Do not tell lies." The Sheikh spoke gently, then bowed his head, his beard fanning out over his chest, and seemed lost in thought.

Said waited, then shifted backwards to rest against one of the bookshelves, where for several minutes he sat contemplating the fine-looking old man, until finally impatience made him ask, "Is there anything I could do for you?"

The Sheikh did not bother to respond and a period of silence

followed, during which Said watched a line of ants nimbly crawling along a fold in the mat. Suddenly the Sheikh said, "Take a copy of the Koran and read."

A little confused, Said explained apologetically, "I just got out of jail today, and I have not performed the prayer ablutions."

"Wash yourself now and read."

"My own daughter has rejected me. She was scared of me, as if I was the devil. And before that her mother was unfaithful to me."

"Wash and read," replied the Sheikh, gently.

"She committed adultery with one of my men, a layabout, a mere pupil of mine, utterly servile. She applied for divorce on grounds of my imprisonment and went and married him."

"Wash and read."

"And he took everything I owned, the money and the jewelry. He's a big man now, and all the local crooks have become followers and cronies of his."

"Wash and read."

"It wasn't thanks to any sweat by the police that I was arrested." Said went on, the veins in his forehead pulsing with anger. "No, it wasn't. I was sure of my safety, as usual. It was that dog who betrayed me, in collusion with her. Then disaster followed disaster until finally my daughter rejected me."

"Wash and read the verses: 'Say to them: if you love God, then follow me and God will love you' and 'I have chosen thee for Myself.' Also repeat the words: 'Love is acceptance, which means obeying His commands and refraining from what He has prohibited and contentment with what He decrees and ordains.' "

I could see my father listening and nodding his head with pleasure, looking at me with a smile as if saying: "Listen and learn." I had been happy then, hoping no one could see me, so I could climb the palm tree or throw up a stone to bring down a date, singing to myself along with those chanting men. Then one evening when I'd come back to the students' hostel in Gizeh I saw her coming towards me, holding a basket, pretty and charming, all the joys of heaven and torments of hell that I was fated to experience hidden within her.

What had it been about the chanting I'd liked, when they recited: "As soon as He appeared the beacon of faith shone" and: "I saw the crescent moon and the face of the beloved"? But the sun is not yet set. The last golden thread is receding from the window. A long night is waiting for me, the first night of freedom. I am alone with my freedom, or rather I'm in the company of the Sheikh, who is lost in heaven, repeating words that cannot be understood by someone approaching hell. What other refuge have I?

3

Flipping eagerly through the pages of *al-Zahra* until he found Rauf Ilwan's column, Said began to read while still only a few yards from the house where he'd spent the night, the house of Sheikh Ali al-Junaydi. But what was it that seemed to be inspiring Ilwan now? Said found only comments on women's fashions, on loudspeakers, and a reply to a complaint by an anonymous wife. Diverting enough, indeed, but what had become of the Rauf Ilwan he'd known? Said thought of the good old days at the students' hostel, and particularly of the wonderful enthusiasm that had radiated from a young peasant with shabby clothes, a big heart, and a direct and glittering style of writing. What was it that had happened in the world? What lay behind these strange and mysterious events? Did things happen that were similar to what took place in the Sayrafi alley? And how about Nabawiyya and Ilish and that dear little girl who rejected her father? I must see him, he thought. The Sheikh has given me a mat to sleep on, but I need money. *I must begin life afresh, Mr.*

Ilwan, and for that purpose you are no less important than Sheikh Ali. You are, in fact, the most important thing I have in this insecure world.

He walked on until he reached the *Zahra* offices in Maarif Square, stopping in front of an enormous building where his first thought was that it would be very difficult to break into. The rows of cars surrounding it were like guards along a prison; the rumble of printing presses behind the grille of the basement windows was like the low hum of men sleeping in a dormitory. He joined the stream of people entering the building, presented himself at the information desk and asked in his deep "public" voice for Mr. Rauf Ilwan. Staring back with some displeasure at the bold, almost impudent, look in his eyes, the reception clerk snapped, "Fourth floor." Said made for the lift at once, joining people among whom he looked rather out of place in his blue suit and gym shoes, the oddness emphasized by the glaring eyes on either side of his long aquiline nose. A girl caught his eye, which made him curse his ex-wife and her lover under his breath, promising them destruction.

From the corridor of the fourth floor he slipped into the secretary's office before an attendant had time to intercept him and found himself in a large rectangular room with one glass wall overlooking the street, but no place to sit. He heard the secretary talking to someone on the telephone, declaring that Mr. Rauf was at a meeting with the editor-in-chief and would not be back for at least two hours. Feeling alien and out of place, Said poised himself with bravado, staring at the other people in the room almost defiantly, remembering a time when he would have fixed his gaze on people like them as if he wished to cut their throats. What were such people like nowadays, he wondered.

Rauf was now a very important man, it seemed, a great man, as great as this room. It isn't a suitable place for reunion of old friends. Rauf won't be able to behave naturally here. There was a time when he'd been nothing more than a scribbler with the magazine *al-Nadhir,* tucked away in Sharia Muhammad Ali, a poor writer whose voice rang with demands for freedom. *I wonder what you're like now, Rauf. Will he have changed, like you, Nabawiyya? Will he disown me, as Sana has done? No, I must banish these evil thoughts. He's still a friend and mentor, a sword of freedom ever drawn, and he'll always be like that, despite this impressiveness, this plush office suite, and those puzzling articles. If this citadel will not allow me to embrace you, Rauf, I'll have to look in the telephone directory and find your home address.*

Seated on the damp grass along the river bank beside Sharia al-Nil, he waited. He waited even longer near a tree silhouetted by the light of an electric lamp. The crescent moon had gone down early, leaving stars to glitter in a sky profoundly black, and a soft breeze blew, distilled from the breath of the night after a day of stunning, searing summer. There he sat, with his arms clasped round his knees and his back to the river, his eyes fixed on villa number eighteen.

What a palace, he thought. It was open on three sides, and an extensive garden lay on the fourth. The trees stood around the white body of the building like whispering figures. A scene like this felt familiar, full of reminders of the good living he'd once enjoyed. How had Rauf managed it? By what means? And in such a short time! Not even thieves could dream of owning a thing like this: *I never used to look at a villa like this except when I was making plans to break into it. Is there really any hope of finding friendship in such a place now? You are indeed a mystery, Rauf Ilwan, and you must be made to reveal your secret.*

Wasn't it strange that Ilwan rhymed with Mahran? And that that dog Ilish should grab and wallow in the fruits of my lifetime's labor?

When a car stopped in front of the villa gate he sprang to his feet. As the porter opened the gate he darted across the road and stood before the car, bending a little so the driver could see him. When the man inside apparently failed to recognize him in the dark, Said roared "Mr. Rauf, I am Said Mahran." The man put his head close to the open window of the car and repeated his name, in obvious surprise, his low voice carefully modulated. Said could not read Rauf's expression, but the tone of voice was encouraging. After a moment of silence and inaction, the car door opened and Said heard him say, "Get in."

A good beginning, he thought. Rauf Ilwan was the same man he knew, despite the glass-filled office-suite and the lovely villa. The car

went down a drive that curved like the shape of a violin, towards a flight of steps leading to the main entrance of the house.

"How are you, Said? When did you come out?"

"Yesterday."

"Yesterday?"

"Yes, I should have come to see you, but I had some things I had to attend to and I needed rest, so I spent the night at Sheikh Ali al-Jumaydi's. Remember him?"

"Sure. Your late father's Sheikh. I watched his meetings with you lots of times." They left the car and went into the reception hall.

"They were fun, weren't they?"

"Yes, and I used to get a big kick out of their singing."

A servant switched on the chandelier, and Said's eyes were dazzled by its size, its multitude of upturned bulbs, its stars and crescents. The light that spread throughout the room was caught in mirrors at the corners, reflecting the brilliance. Objets d'art on gilt stands were displayed as if they had been salvaged from the obscurity of history for that sole purpose. The ceiling, he saw looking up, was richly decorated, while all around him comfortable chairs and cushions were casually disposed among vividly patterned carpets. His eyes rested last on the face of Maitre Ilwan, now round and full, a face he had loved, whose features he had long ago learnt by heart, having gazed at it so often while listening to Rauf speak; and, stealing occasional glances at the objets d'art, Said went on examining that face while a servant drew back curtains and opened French windows to the verandah overlooking the garden, letting a breeze heavy with the perfume of blossomy trees flow into the room.

The mixture of light and scent was distracting, but Said observed that Ilwan's face had become cow-like in its fullness, and that despite his apparent friendliness and courtesy, there was something chilly about him, as well as an unfamiliar and rather disturbing suavity, a quality that could only have come from a touch of blue blood, despite Rauf's flat nose and heavy jaw. What refuge would be left if this only surviving support also collapsed?

Rauf sat near the French windows to the verandah on a sofa that was arranged with three easy chairs in a square around a luminous

pillar adorned with mythological figures. Said sat down, without hesitation and without showing his anxiety.

Ilwan stretched out his long legs. "Did you look for me at the paper?"

"Yes, but I saw it wasn't a suitable place for us to meet."

Rauf laughed, showing teeth stained black at the gums. "The office is like a whirlpool, in constant motion. Have you been waiting long here?"

"A lifetime!"

Rauf laughed again. "There was a time no doubt when you were quite familiar with this street?"

"Of course." Said, too, laughed. "I've had clients here with whom my business transactions have made their premises unforgettable. The villa of Fadil Hasanain Pasha, for instance, where my visit netted a thousand pounds, or the one that belongs to the film star Kawakib, where I got a pair of superb diamond earrings."

The servant came in pushing a trolley laden with a bottle, two glasses, a pretty little violet-colored ice bucket, a dish of apples arranged in a pyramid, plates with hors d'oeuvres, and a silver water jug.

Rauf gestured to the servant to withdraw, filled two glasses himself and offered one to Said, raising the other: "To freedom." While Said emptied his glass in one gulp, Rauf took a sip then said, "And how is your daughter? Oh, I forgot to ask you—why did you spend the night at Sheikh Ali's?"

He doesn't know what happened, thought Said, but he still remembers my daughter. And he gave Rauf a cold-blooded account of his misfortunes.

"So yesterday I paid a visit to al-Sayrafi Lane," he concluded. "There I found a detective waiting for me, as I'd expected, and my daughter disowned me and screamed in my face." He helped himself to another whisky.

"This is a sad story. But your daughter isn't to blame. She can't remember you now. Later on she'll grow to know and love you."

"I have no faith left in all her sex."

"That's how you feel now. But tomorrow, who knows how you'll

feel? You'll change your opinion of your own accord. That's the way of the world."

The telephone rang. Rauf rose, picked up the receiver and listened for a moment. His face began to beam and he carried the telephone outside to the verandah, while Said's sharp eyes registered everything. It must be a woman. A smile like that, strolling into the dark, could only mean a woman. He wondered if Ilwan was still unmarried. Though they sat there cozily drinking and chatting, Said now sensed that this meeting would be exceedingly difficult to repeat. The feeling was unaccountable, like the whispered premonition of some still undiagnosed cancerous growth, but he trusted it, relying on instinct. A resident now in one of those streets that Said had only visited as a burglar, after all, this man may have felt obliged to welcome him, having actually changed so much that only a shadow of the old self remained. When Said heard Rauf's sudden laugh resounding on the verandah, he felt even less reassured. Calmly, however, he took an apple and began to munch it, pondering the extent to which his whole life had been no more than the mere acting out of ideas that had come from that man now chuckling into a telephone. What if Rauf should prove to have betrayed those ideas?

He would then have to pay dearly for it. On that score there was not the slightest doubt.

Rauf Ilwan came in from the verandah, replaced the telephone and sat down looking extremely pleased. "So. Congratulations on your freedom. Being free is precious indeed. It more than makes up for losing anything else, no matter how valuable." Helping himself to a slice of pastrami, Said nodded in agreement, but without real interest in what had just been said. "And now you've come out of prison to find a new world," Rauf went on, refilling both glasses while Said wolfed down the hors d'oeuvres.

Glancing at his companion, Said caught a look of disgust, quickly covered by a smile. You must be mad to think he was sincere in welcoming you. This is only superficial courtesy—doing the right thing—and will evaporate. Every kind of treachery pales beside this; what a void would then swallow up the entire world!

Rauf stretched his hand to a cigarette box adorned with Chinese characters, placed in a hollow in the illuminated pillar. "My dear Said," he said, taking a cigarette, "everything that used to spoil life's pleasures for us has now completely disappeared."

"The news astounded us in prison," Said said, his mouth full of food. "Who could have predicted such things?" He looked at Rauf, smiling. "No class war now?"

"Let there be a truce! Every struggle has its proper field of battle."

"And this magnificent drawing room," said Said, looking around him, "is like a parade-ground." He saw a cold look in his companion's eyes and regretted the words instantly. Why can't your tongue ever learn to be polite?

"What do you mean?" Rauf's voice was icy.

"I mean it's a model of sophisticated taste and—"

"Don't try to be evasive," said Rauf with narrowed eyes. "Out with it. I understand you perfectly, I know you better than anybody else."

Said attempted a disarming laugh, then said, "I meant no harm at all."

"Never forget that I live by the sweat of my brow."

"I haven't doubted that for a moment. Please don't be angry."

Rauf puffed hard on his cigarette but made no further comment.

Aware that he ought to stop eating, Said said apologetically, "I haven't quite got over the atmosphere of prison. I need some time to recover my good manners and learn polite conversation. Apart from the fact that my head's still spinning from that strange meeting, when my own daughter rejected me."

Rauf's Mephistophelean eyebrows lifted in what looked like silent forgiveness. When he saw Said's gaze wander from his face to the food, as if asking permission to resume eating, he said, "Help yourself," quite calmly.

Said attacked the rest of the dishes without hesitation, as if nothing had happened, until he'd wiped them clean. At this point Rauf said, a little quickly, as if he wished to end the meeting: "Things must now change completely. Have you thought about your future?"

Said lit a cigarette. "My past hasn't yet allowed me to consider the future."

"It occurs to me that there are more women in the world than men. So you mustn't let the infidelity of one lone female bother you. As for your daughter, she'll get to know you and love you one day. The important thing now is to look for a job."

Said eyed a statue of a Chinese god, a perfect embodiment of dignity and repose. "I learned tailoring in prison."

"So you want to set up a tailoring shop?" said Rauf with surprise.

"Certainly not," Said replied quietly.

"What then?"

Said looked at him. "In my whole life I've mastered only one trade."

"You're going back to burglary?" Rauf seemed almost alarmed.

"It's most rewarding, as you know."

"As I know! How the hell do I know?"

"Why are you so angry?" Said gave him a surprised look. "I meant as you know from my past. Isn't it so?"

Rauf lowered his eyes as if trying to assess the sincerity of Said's remark, clearly unable to maintain his bonhomie, and looking for a way to end the meeting. "Listen, Said. Things are no longer what they used to be. In the past you were both a thief and my friend, for reasons you well know. Now the situation has changed. If you go back to burglary you'll be a thief and nothing else."

Dashed by Rauf's unaccommodating frankness, Said sprang to his feet. Then he stifled his agitation, sat down again, and said quietly, "All right. Choose a job that's suitable for me."

"Any job, no matter what. You do the talking, I'll listen."

"I should be happy," Said began, without obvious irony, "to work as a journalist on your paper. I'm a well-educated man and an old disciple of yours. Under your supervision I've read countless books, and you often testified to my intelligence."

Rauf shook his head impatiently, his thick black hair glistening in the brilliant light. "This is no time for joking. You've never been a writer, and you came out of jail only yesterday. This fooling about is wasting my time."

"So I have to choose something menial?"

"No job is menial, as long as it's honest."

Said felt utterly reckless. He ran his eyes quickly over the whole of the smart drawing room, then said bitterly, "How marvellous it is for the rich to recommend poverty to us." Rauf's reaction was to look at his watch.

"I am sure I have taken too much of your time," Said said quietly.

"Yes," said Rauf, with all the blank directness of a July sun, "I'm loaded with work!"

"Thanks for your kindness and hospitality and for the supper," said Said, standing up.

Rauf took out his wallet and handed him two five-pound notes. "Take these to tide you over. Please forgive me for saying I'm overloaded with work. You'll seldom find me free as I was tonight."

Said smiled, took the bank notes, shook his hand warmly and wished him well: "May God increase your good fortune."

4

So this is the real Rauf Ilwan, the naked reality—a partial corpse not even decently underground. The other Rauf Ilwan has gone, disappeared, like yesterday, like the first day in the history of man—like Nabawiyya's love or Ilish's loyalty. I must not be deceived by appearances. His kind words are cunning, his smiles no more than a curl of the lips, his generosity a defensive flick of the fingers and only a sense of guilt moved him to let me cross the threshold of his house. You made me and now you reject me: Your ideas create their embodiment in my person and then you simply change them, leaving me lost—rootless, worthless, without hope—a betrayal so vile that if the whole Muqattam hill toppled over and buried it, I still would not be satisfied.

I wonder if you ever admit, even to yourself, that you betrayed me. Maybe you've deceived yourself as much as you try to deceive others. Hasn't your conscience bothered you even in the dark? I wish I could penetrate your soul as easily as I've penetrated your house, that house of mirrors and objets d'art, but I suppose I'd find nothing but betrayal there: Nabawiyya disguised as

Rauf, Rauf disguised as Nabawiyya, or Ilish Sidra in place of both—and betrayal would cry out to me that it was the lowest crime on earth. Their eyes behind my back must have traded anxious looks throbbing with lust, which carried them in a current crawling like death, like a cat creeping on its belly towards a bewildered sparrow. When their chance came, the last remnants of decency and indecision disappeared so that in a corner of the lane, even in my own house, Ilish Sidra finally said: "I'll tell the police. We'll get rid of him" and the child's mother was silent—the tongue that so often and so profusely told me "I love you, the best man in the world" was silent. And I found myself surrounded by police in Sayrafi Lane—though until then demons themselves with all their wiles had failed to trap me—their kicks and punches raining down on me.

You're just the same, Rauf—I don't know which of you is the most treacherous—except that your guilt is greater because of your intelligence and the past association between us: You pushed me into jail, while you leapt free, into that palace of lights and mirrors. You've forgotten your wise sayings about palaces and hovels, haven't you? I will never forget.

At the Abbas Bridge, sitting on a stone bench, he became aware for the first time of where he was.

"It's best to do it now," he said in a loud voice, as if addressing the dark, "before he's had time to get over the shock." I can't hold back, he thought. My profession will always be mine, a just and legitimate trade, especially when it's directed against its own philosopher. There'll be space enough in the world after I've punished the bastards to hide. If I could live without a past, ignoring Nabawiyya, Ilish, and Rauf, I'd be relieved of a great weight, a burden; I'd feel readier to win an easy life and a lot further from the rope. But unless I settle my account with them, life will have no taste because I shall not forget the past. For the simple reason that in my mind it's not a past, but the here and now. Tonight's adventure will be the best beginning for my programme of action. And it'll be a rich venture indeed.

The Nile flowed in black waves slashed sidelong by arrows of light from the reflected street lamps along its banks. The silence was soothing and total.

At the approach of dawn as the stars drew closer to earth, Said

rose from his seat, stretched, and began to walk slowly back along the bank towards the place from which he'd come, avoiding the few still-lit lamps, slowing his steps even further when the house came in sight. Examining the street, the terrain, the walls of the big houses as well as the river bank, his eyes finally came to rest on the sleeping villa, guarded on all sides by trees like ghostly figures, where treachery dozed in a fine unmerited tranquillity. *It's going to be a rich venture, indeed, and one to provide an emphatic reply to the treachery of a lifetime.*

He crossed the street casually without a movement to either right or left, without looking wary. Then followed the hedge down a side street, scanning carefully ahead. When he was sure the street was empty he dodged into the hedge, forcing his way in amidst the jasmine and violets, and stood motionless: If there was a dog in the house—other than its owner, of course—it would now fill the universe with barking.

But not a whisper came out of the silence.

Rauf, your pupil is coming, to relieve you of a few worldly goods.

He climbed the hedge nimbly, his expert limbs agile as an ape's, undeterred by the thick, intertwining branches, the heavy foliage and flowers. Gripping the railings, he heaved his body up by main force over the sharp-pointed spikes, then lowered himself until his legs caught the branches inside the garden. Here he clung for a while regaining his breath, studying the terrain: a jungle of bushes, trees, and dark shadows. *I shall have to climb up to the roof and find a way to get in and down. I have no tools, no flashlight, no good knowledge of the house: Nabawiyya hasn't been here before me pretending to work for a while as a washerwoman or a maid; she's busy now with Ilish Sidra.*

Scowling in the dark, trying to chase these thoughts from his mind, he dropped lightly to the ground. Crawling up to the villa on all fours, he felt his way along a wall until he found a drain pipe. Then, gripping it like an acrobat, began to climb towards the roof. Part way up he spotted an open window, just out of reach, and decided instantly to try it. He steered one foot to the window ledge, and shifted his hands one at a time, to grip a cornice. Finally when he could stand with his whole weight, he slid inside, finding himself in what he guessed was the kitchen. The dense darkness was disturbing and he

groped for the door. The darkness would be even thicker inside, but where else could he find Rauf's wallet or some of his objets d'art? He had to go on.

Slipping through the door, feeling along the wall with his hands, he had covered a considerable distance, almost deterred by the darkness, when he felt a slight draught touch his face. Puzzling where it could come from, he turned a corner and crept along the smooth wall, his arm stretched out, feeling ahead with his fingers. Suddenly they brushed some dangling beads which rustled slightly as he touched them, making him start. A curtain. He must now be near his goal. He thought of the box of matches in his pocket; instead of reaching for it he made a quiet little opening for himself in the hanging beads and slipped through, bringing the curtain back to position behind him slowly, to avoid making any sound. He took one step forward and bumped some object, perhaps a chair, which he edged away from, raising his head to look for a night light he hoped he would find. All he could see was a darkness that weighed down upon him like a nightmare. For a moment he thought again of lighting a match.

Suddenly he was assailed by light. It shone all around him, so powerful that it struck him with the force of a blow, making him shut his eyes. When he opened them again, Rauf Ilwan was standing only a couple of yards from him, wearing a long dressing-gown, which made him look like a giant, one hand tensed in a pocket, as if he was clutching a weapon. The cold look in his eyes chilled Said to the core, his tightly closed lips; nothing but deep hatred, hostility. The ensuing silence was suffocating, claustrophobic, denser than the walls of a prison. Abd Rabbuh the jailer would soon be jeering: "Back already?"

"Shall we call the police?" someone behind him said curtly. Said turned round and saw three servants standing in a row. "Wait outside," said Rauf, breaking the silence.

As the door opened and closed Said observed that it was made of wood in arabesque designs, its upper panel inlaid with an inscription, probably a proverb or a Koranic verse. He turned to face Rauf.

"It was idiotic of you to try your tricks on me; I know you. I can read you like an open book." Speechless, helpless, and resigned, still

recovering from the shock of surprise, Said had nevertheless an instinctive sense that he would not be handed back to the custody from which he'd been set free the day before. "I've been waiting for you, fully prepared. In fact I even drew up your plan of action. I'd hoped my expectation would be disappointed. But evidently no mistrust in you can prove groundless." Said lowered his eyes for a moment and became aware of the patterned parquet beneath the wax on the floor. Then he looked up, saying nothing. "It's no use. You'll always be worthless and you'll die a worthless death. The best thing I can do now is hand you over to the police." Said blinked, gulped, and lowered his eyes again.

"What have you come for?" Rauf demanded angrily. "You treat me as an enemy. You've forgotten my kindness, my charity. You feel nothing but malice and envy. I know your thoughts, as clearly as I know your actions."

His eyes still wandering over the floor, Said muttered, "I feel dizzy. Peculiar. It's been like that ever since I came out of jail."

"Liar! Don't try to deceive me. You thought I'd become one of the rich I used to attack. And with that in mind you wished to treat me—"

"It's not true."

"Then why did you break into my house? Why do you want to rob me?"

"I don't know," Said said, after a moment's hesitation. "I'm not in my proper state of mind. But you don't believe me."

"Of course I don't. You know you're lying. My good advice didn't persuade you. Your envy and arrogance were aroused, so you rushed in headlong as always, like a madman. Suit yourself, do what you like, but you'll find yourself in jail again."

"Please forgive me. My mind's the way it was in prison, the way it was even before that."

"There's no forgiving you. I can read your thoughts, everything that passes through your mind. I can see exactly what you think of me. And now it's time I delivered you to the police."

"Please don't."

"No? Don't you deserve it?"

"Yes, I do, but please don't."

"If I set eyes on you again," Rauf bellowed, "I'll squash you like an insect." Thus dismissed, Said was about to make a quick exit, but Rauf stopped him with a shout: "Give me back the money." Frozen for a second, Said slipped his hand into his pocket and brought out the two banknotes. Rauf took them and said, "Don't ever show me your face again."

Said walked back to the banks of the Nile, hardly believing his escape, though relief was spoiled by a sense of defeat and now in the damp breath of early daybreak, he wondered how he could have failed to take careful note of the room where he'd been caught, how all he'd noticed had been its decorated door and its waxed parquet. But the dawn shed dewy compassion giving momentary solace for the loss of everything, even the two banknotes, and he surrendered to it. Raising his head to the sky, he found himself awed by the dazzling brilliance of the stars at this hour just before sunrise.